

WELS NEWS

October, 2015

Progress In Doctrinal Discussions

On Aug. 21, 2015, representatives of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC), the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) met in Mankato, Minn., for their third round of doctrinal discussions. It is a joy to report that the nine participants agreed to a revision of the 1990 document entitled “Joint Statement Regarding the Termination of Fellowship.” This document will now be sent to the CLC Board of Doctrine, the ELS Doctrine Committee, and the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations for their consideration.

Agreement on this document does not imply full agreement on all the controverted matters. There still are a number of significant issues to discuss, and another meeting has been scheduled for Nov. 13, 2015. But this agreement is a good first step in overcoming the differences between our synods.

Presumably the “Joint Statement” will be made public in the future, but at this point the appropriate committees from each synod are reviewing the document without public distribution. Prayers are welcomed that God will continue to guide this process for good.

The doctrinal discussions between WELS, the ELS, and the CLC have been described as “formal” because they have the potential to lead to a restoration of fellowship relations between the CLC, ELS, and WELS on the basis of a unity in doctrine. In contrast, the ongoing talks with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have been characterized as “informal” discussions. They are informal because, while the discussions will help the church bodies understand and clarify respective doctrinal positions, it is the understanding of all involved that such informal discussions are only a very preliminary and necessary first step to a possible restoration of fellowship in the future. Certainly all of us pray that God would someday make that restoration of fellowship take place, but only if it can be demonstrated that the synods share a full unity in doctrine and practice. Representatives of WELS, ELS, and LCMS will meet for the fourth time in December.

Serving in Christ,
President Mark Schroeder

WELS Night Draws Large Crowd

On a hot summer night, several thousand WELS members joined baseball fans in Milwaukee, Wis., to see the Milwaukee Brewers defeat the Philadelphia Phillies during the second annual WELS Night at Miller Park,

Aug. 14.

“More than 1,700 members attended the inaugural WELS Night at Miller Park in 2014, and several members contacted me after the game and suggested we schedule this year’s event on a Friday evening so more congregations from outside the Milwaukee area could participate. We more than doubled the number of WELS members in attendance this year, and I feel the event will get bigger each coming year,” says Mr. Lee Hitter, director, WELS Communication Services.

WELS President Mark Schroeder, along with representatives from Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; and Northwestern Publishing House, formed a welcoming committee as dozens of buses unloaded thousands of WELS members from congregations throughout the Midwest.

“The number of WELS members who attended WELS Night at Miller Park (more than 3,500) is truly staggering, and we are grateful to host such a wonderful group,” says Jason Fry, senior manager of ticket sales and WELS member.

Inside the stadium, the pregame festivities continued with Schroeder throwing out the ceremonial first pitch. He fired a strike over the plate that was caught by Brewers coaching assistant and former MLB pitcher Joe Crawford. “It wasn’t a 90 mph fastball, but it made it to the catcher without a bounce,” says Schroeder.

As the singing of the National Anthem was announced, WELS member Brian Davison, lead vocal for Koiné, approached the on-field microphone and led the 35,000 fans in a beautiful rendition of the “Star Spangled Banner.”

During the fourth inning the Brewers junior announcer, nine-year-old Andrew Justman, a fourth grader from Pilgrim Lutheran School, Menomonee Falls, Wis., belted out the Brewers line-up.

“It was a tremendously fun and memorable experience for Andrew, his immediate family, and all the extended WELS family, friends, and loved ones who were able to witness it,” says Jared Justman, Andrew’s father.

“For the second year in a row, WELS Night was an enormous success. It’s very clear that WELS members share a special bond, and it was felt at Miller Park on Friday as thousands joined together to cheer on the Brewers. Thanks to everyone who made the trip, and we look forward to another successful WELS Night in 2016,” says Fry.

Endowment Distributions Help Missions

Where would you expect more than 100 people from 12 different African nations joining together in Lutheran worship? Las Vegas, Nev., is home to Chapel of Improvement Christian Fellowship, a group of Christians comprising mostly African refugees who are now reaching out to new refugees by providing material items to help them settle in the U.S. along with spiritual care to nourish their souls.

The congregation is served by Isaac David, Jr., who is training to be a full-time pastor via the Pastoral Studies Institute through Wisconsin

Lutheran Seminary.

The church aims to assist the refugee immigrants as they transition to life in America, using this opportunity to proclaim to them the gospel of Jesus. David, from Africa himself, explains, “While in the refugee camp, people make all kinds of promises to God if he will let them get to America. Our job is to help them keep those promises.”

By serving as a “first friend,” an immediate bridge to the gospel is built with each African immigrant. In fact, each immigrant family is visited by David himself first, and then his visit is followed up by others from the congregation.

The congregation has a warehouse for household items donated by WELS members in the Las Vegas area. These donations are given for free to immigrants as needed to supply them with things such as beds, mattresses, chairs, and tables. With volunteers from Water of Life, Las Vegas, a weekly English-as-a-second-language program has begun, including a spiritual dimension to each lesson.

Recognizing this congregation’s unique ministry and challenges, the WELS Joint Mission Council, which oversees synodically funded cross-cultural ministry in the U.S., will provide support to this mission with funds from this year’s endowment distribution.

In addition to refugee outreach in Las Vegas, Rev. Keith Free, administrator of the Board for Home Missions, says, “Over the past two years distributions have helped to support Hmong ministry, two cross-cultural ministries in the U.S., and the mission in Vancouver. In August of 2015, Mission distributions are helping to fund two lay evangelists who plan to serve those in New York City who speak Urdu.”

For 2015, distributions to WELS and WELS-affiliated ministries from endowment funds total nearly \$1.5 million. These distributions will have a beneficial reach beyond Las Vegas with the majority of distributions supporting World Missions, Home Missions, and the four WELS Ministerial Education schools.

“An endowment fund allows for your contribution to provide unending funding to ministry,” says Rev. Kurt Lueneburg, WELS director of Christian Giving. “We thank Jesus for his blessings through his people’s gifts and our investments.”

In addition to WELS Missions and schools, WELS Foundation help individual congregations, area Lutheran high schools, and other parasynodical ministries set up endowment funds for their ministry work. Mr. Jim Holm, executive director of WELS Foundation, says, “Endowment funds can provide an excellent source of ongoing financial support for ministry; however, they do require proper investment management and complex accounting. WELS Foundation provides endowment administration for WELS congregations and members who would like to establish an endowment fund but without the associated administrative burden.”

To learn more about WELS Foundation and how to support ministry work

with your planned gift, visit wels.net/wels-foundation.

Supporting WELS College Students

WELS campus ministries across the United States and Canada are now welcoming back returning students and contacting new students. The mission of these campus ministries is to help WELS college students grow in their faith so that they can reach out to other college students with the gospel.

“Campus ministry is such an important time in the lives of our students because this is when they are making their faith their own,” says Rev. Charlie Vannieuwenhoven, pastor at Northdale, Tampa, Fla., and chairman of the WELS Campus Ministry Committee. “For many, this is the first time they are out of the house and on their own. Mom and Dad aren’t getting them up on Sunday morning to go to worship or dropping them off to Bible study. They are learning to stand alone on their faith. They are facing the challenges that come with adult life, and campus ministry helps them to work through the situations, reminds them of God’s promises and love in Jesus, and helps them to stand firm in their faith.”

Rev. Caleb Schoeneck, pastor at Beautiful Savior, College Station, Texas, recently met with a student facing one of those challenges. Schoeneck works with students from Texas A&M University through the campus ministry work that Beautiful Savior supports.

As Schoeneck explains, “Last week I caught up with a student who had just climbed up high enough to see over the edge of the hole he had sunk into. He thought he found ‘the one’ but he simply hadn’t found the right diamond ring for her. Before he was able to get down on one knee, her feet were on the way out of the relationship, and he was left broken-hearted. When we caught up with each other to talk about it, I was surprised at how well he seemed to be handling it. That’s when he told me that he had a post-it note on his computer screen that said, ‘The Bible is God’s way of saying, “Trust me.”’ When I asked him where he picked that phrase up, he said, ‘Pastor, you taught that at a college student Bible study!’” For Schoeneck and all those who serve the more than 550 WELS campus ministries, this is a pivotal time of year. Now is the time to reach out and let students know that worship, Bible study, fellowship, and support are available for them. In order to do that, though, Vannieuwenhoven says that campus ministries need to have current contact information for students.

“When our students remain connected to God’s Word through these challenging years,” says Vannieuwenhoven, “they are ready to move forward in their lives even more confident in their Savior as active members and leaders in their churches.”

To submit new or updated contact information for a college student, visit wels.net/campus-ministry.